

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONVICTION IN DRUG CONSPIRACY CASE WHERE ELDERLY COUPLES UTILIZED FOR TRANSPORTATION OF MARIJUANA

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on December 17, 2003, Michael E. Hernandez, of Tucson, Arizona, was found guilty of Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute marijuana by a federal jury in Phoenix, Arizona. Co-defendants Barton Smith and Michael Hockerman had previously pled guilty to state and federal narcotics violations.

The evidence at trial showed that Hernandez made arrangements for the distribution of large amounts of marijuana to Illinois, New York, Indiana and other locations. The organization used motor homes to hide the marijuana. During trial the evidence showed that Hernandez made several incriminating statements to others and he was selling thousands of pounds of marijuana per month in Arizona and outside of Arizona. Additionally, for the purpose of transporting marijuana for the organization rental vehicles were used and elderly couples were utilized for the transportation of the marijuana in hopes of thwarting law enforcement.

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The case was tried before United States District Court Judge Roslyn O. Silver on December 9, 2003 through December 17, 2003. The defendant's sentencing is scheduled to take place on March 2, 2003.

Defendant faces a maximum sentence of forty years in prison and a maximum fine of \$2,000,000.00 or both. The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation section, Drug Enforcement Administration, the Holbrook Police Department, Major Crimes Apprehension Team, Navaho County Sheriff's Office and the Arizona Department of Public Safety. The prosecution is being handled by Steven P. Logan, OCDEFT (Operation Big Cheese), Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-03-275-PHX-R0S
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